

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, RI

**"The Operational Commander, the Media, and MOOTW: A New
Paradigm."**

By

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19990520 063

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal view and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A
Approved for Public Release
Distribution Unlimited

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
6. Office Symbol: C		7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207	
8. Title (Include Security Classification): The Operational Commander, the Media, and MOOTW: A New Paradigm (UNCLASSIFIED)			
9. Personal Authors: LCDR Timothy D. Reynolds, USN			
10. Type of Report: FINAL		11. Date of Report: 5 February 1999	
12. Page Count: 24			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: OPERATIONAL COMMANDER, MEDIA, MOOTW, MILITARY-MEDIA RELATIONSHIP, PARADIGM, SOMALIA			
15. Abstract: While there will always be a degree of tension in military-media relations, the nature of MOOTW offers the operational commander a new paradigm defined by unprecedented levels of openness and cooperation. In the past, fears of compromising the mission and the operational security (OPSEC) of the forces were the overriding concerns that drove the military-media relationship; today's mission accomplishment and OPSEC may actually be enhanced by disclosing information to the media. With the help of U.S. Somalia operations from 1992-1995, we will examine the nature of these operations other than war and their implications for the operational commander-media relationship. Specifically, we will examine four defining characteristics of MOOTW that portend this new paradigm of openness and cooperation.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified X	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
19. Telephone: 841-6461		20. Office Symbol: C	

Abstract of

THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER, THE MEDIA, AND MOOTW: A
NEW PARADIGM

While there will always be a degree of tension in military-media relations, the nature of MOOTW offers the operational commander a new paradigm defined by unprecedented levels of openness and cooperation. In the past, fears of compromising the mission and the operational security (OPSEC) of the forces were the overriding concerns that drove the military-media relationship; today's mission accomplishment and OPSEC may actually be enhanced by disclosing information to the media.

With the help of U.S. Somalia operations from 1992-1995, we will examine the nature of these operations other than war and their implications for the operational commander-media relationship. Specifically, we will examine four defining characteristics of MOOTW that portend this new paradigm of openness and cooperation.

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INTRODUCTION: ROAD TO A NEW PARADIGM

Should the military be doing this (MOOTW)? Whether we should or shouldn't, I'll tell you this---we are.¹

The media is more important to the military in operations other than war than it is in high-intensity conflict.²

Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. military has found itself increasingly involved in military operations other than war (MOOTW). These types of operations are extensive and diverse. According to Joint Pub 3-07, they include: arms control; combating terrorism; Department of Defense support to counterdrug operations; enforcement of sanctions/maritime intercept operations; enforcing exclusion zones; ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight; humanitarian assistance; military support to civil authorities; nation assistance/support to counterinsurgency; noncombatant evacuation operations; peace operations; protection of shipping; recovery operations; show of force operations; strikes and raids; and support to insurgency.³ Obviously, each operation has very different mission objectives, commander's intent, desired end state and exit strategy. One need only look at recent U.S. military involvement in Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti to appreciate the complexities of these operations.

Consequently, much has been written about the use of this nation's fighting forces in operations other than war. Some have focused the debate on the appropriateness of these types of missions for the U.S. military. While academics and policy makers will continue the debate, the argument, as stated by General Zinni above, is a moot point. We are doing them.

Within the military, the focus has been on how we do them. Most of the time our

conventional forces train to fight and win this nation's wars. Each of the services has fine-tuned its doctrine, tactics and training toward that end. However, the skills required to fight and win wars can be very different than those needed to support peace operations. As a result, many have argued that the military must modify or create new doctrine, tactics, and training methods to deal with these unique missions.

In addition to the reexamination of doctrine, tactics, and training, the relationship of the military commander and the media has undergone similar review.⁴ Many of the issues that caused such divisiveness in warfare do not have the same relevance in most MOOTW scenarios. The old model for this relationship was largely founded on mistrust. The inherent tensions can best be summed up with this 1944 quote from General Dwight D. Eisenhower: "The first essential in military operations is that no information of value shall be given to the enemy. The first essential in newspaper work and broadcasting is wide-open publicity."⁵

While there will always be a degree of tension in military-media relations, the nature of MOOTW offers the operational commander a new paradigm defined by unprecedented levels of openness and cooperation. In the past, fears of compromising the mission and the operational security (OPSEC) of the forces were the overriding concerns that drove the military-media relationship; today's mission accomplishment and OPSEC may actually be enhanced by disclosing information to the media. With the help of U.S. Somalia operations from 1992-1995, we will examine the nature of these operations other than war and their implications for the operational commander-media relationship. Specifically, we will examine four defining characteristics of MOOTW that portend this new paradigm of openness and cooperation.

CAVEATS ALONG THE WAY

However, before we begin, a note of caution. Recently, some have described military operations as a “seamless portrait of operations and have ignored the war/MOOTW distinction altogether.”⁶ While there may be merit to this approach, the author correspondingly recognizes the conceptual value as expressed in joint publications of separating MOOTW from war. One of the Principles of War is that of the “offensive.” “It is the most effective and decisive way to attain a clearly defined objective.”⁷

However, military actions in many MOOTW scenarios are defensive by nature. More often than not, one’s goals are to keep others from fighting while at the same time trying to avoid making enemies. As a result, the principle of the “offensive” is been replaced by that of “restraint, legitimacy, and perseverance.”⁸

Therefore, while the author believes this paradigm will apply to many military operations other than war, it will not apply to all. In short, this model will benefit an operational commander most in those MOOTW scenarios that have a “defensive” nature like humanitarian assistance; military support to civil authorities; and peace operations. Those MOOTWs closer in nature to warfare such as strikes and raids are less likely to use the model of openness and cooperation. Consequently, the author’s use of the term MOOTW for this essay is in this more narrowly defined sense. This point should become clearer in the following pages.

BACKGROUND

Events in Somalia largely came to attention in late 1991 and early 1992 when horrific and pitiable images of a starving nation were broadcast worldwide. Actually, if not for Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the unfolding tragedy may have gotten more attention sooner, for Somalia had been deteriorating for a number of years. Since the late 1980s civil war had engulfed the nation and by 1991, it resembled less a nation and more a failed state. In January of that year, the U.S. conducted a noncombatant evacuation operation. By the end of 1991, the regime of Siad Barre had fallen and no less than 14 clans and factions were fighting for control.

As the nation descended into anarchy, drought conditions that had plagued the land continued. Looting, banditry and clan warfare exacerbated the famine. By early 1992 more than one-half million Somalis had starved to death and at least one million more were threatened.⁹ International aid organizations attempted to relieve the suffering but their attempts were hindered by the thievery, banditry and blackmailing.

UNOSOM

In April of 1992, the United Nations passed UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) #751 establishing the United Nations Operation in Somalia. UNOSOM's mission was to both provide humanitarian aid and facilitate the end of hostilities.¹⁰ The U.S. under the leadership of President Bush supported the humanitarian effort with an airlift of aid. The operation was known as Provide Relief. From August to December of 1992, the U.S. conducted the humanitarian airlift from Mombasa and Wajir, Kenya. "A daily average of 20 sorties delivered approximately 150 metric tons of supplies; in total, more than 28,000 metric tons of critically needed relief supplies were brought into

Somalia by this airlift."¹¹ In spite of these efforts, the Humanitarian Relief Organizations (HROs) were unable to adequately distribute the aid. Their efforts were disrupted by the ever-increasing chaos and clan warfare.

UNITAF

As the Somalia situation degenerated, media attention intensified and world pressure grew for decisive action. In December of 1992, the UN passed UNSCR # 794, which mandated military intervention (under Chapter 7), in order to create a secure environment for the humanitarian relief operation. The U.S. took the lead and established United Task Force Somalia (UNITAF). Commander in Chief, Central Command, General Hoar designated the commander of I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), Lieutenant General Robert B. Johnston, as the task force commander. Operation Restore Hope had four objectives:

1. To secure major air and seaports, key installations, and food distribution points
2. To provide open and free passage of relief supplies
3. To provide security for convoys and relief organization operations
4. To assist United nations (UN) / Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in providing humanitarian relief operations under UN auspices.¹²

Once these objectives were accomplished, U.S. intent was to turn the operation over to the United Nations peacekeeping forces.

UNOSOM II

Given the UNITAF's limited objectives, the operation was a success. The military forces provided a secure environment and the HROs and NGOs were able to

address the mass starvation. By March of 1993, UNITAF was ready to turn the mission over to the UN. However, the UN was not ready to take control. UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali wanted to expand the mission and disarm the bandits/clans and begin to rebuild the political and economic institutions of Somalia. U.S. policy makers and military leaders had severe reservations about what was called "mission creep." Nonetheless, UNITAF turned over the mission to the UN in May 1992 and UNOSOM II began.

U.S. forces went from a high of 28,000 troops during Restore Hope to roughly 4,500 troops in Somalia during UNOSOM II. Most of the remaining forces provided logistical or intelligence support. Yet, roughly 1,100 soldiers of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division provided a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in the event of emergencies.

With the expanded mission of UNOSOM II, the situation began to crumble. In June 1993 forces from clan leader Mohammed Farah Aidid ambushed a Pakistani patrol and killed 27. In response, the UN put out a reward for the capture of Aidid. The following month U.S. helicopters assaulted one of Aidid's headquarters in an attempt to capture him. A few months later in October 18 U.S. Army Rangers were killed in a battle at the Olympic Hotel in Mogadishu. With the increasing instability in Somalia and the loss of public support, the U.S. decided to withdraw forces from UNOSOM II. By March of 1994, U.S. forces were out of Somalia.

UNITED SHIELD

Throughout the remaining months of 1994, the crisis in Somalia worsened. By the end of the year, the UN asked the U.S. to assist in the extraction of the remaining UN forces from Somalia. Under the leadership of Lieutenant General Anthony Zinni, the

U.S. lead a seven nation coalition in Operation United Shield. The mission statement was as follows: "CTF deploys to the AOR, provides planning support, and conducts military operations in support of the UNOSOM II withdrawal and retrograde of U.S. and UNOSOM equipment."¹³

Over a 73-hour period, from 28 February to 3 March, coalition forces conducted nine tactical operations. They included "amphibious landings, relief-in-place of one force by another from a different country, withdrawal under pressure, and amphibious withdrawal under pressure."¹⁴ With the completion of United Shield, UN operations in Somalia came to a close.

CALL TO ACTION

The first defining characteristic of MOOTW that portends the new paradigm is related to the "reasons" for U.S. involvement. Somalia, like many recent humanitarian missions did not directly involve vital U.S. national interests. Neither the country's geographic position, natural resources nor markets were of any real value to America. The compelling argument for U.S. intervention was one of morality. How could this world's sole remaining super-power stand by and watch the complete disintegration of a nation? Retired General Bernard Trainor argued that "we certainly went into Somalia because of what was seen on television".¹⁵

At its core, the strategic center of gravity for these types of humanitarian missions is public support. Although one could argue that public support is a strategic center of gravity in war or MOOTW, it is more vulnerable in MOOTW. When the U.S. committed troops to WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf War the decision was

justified because U.S. vital interests were at stake. Although in hindsight, we may differ with those conclusions, they were nonetheless accepted by many at the time. Even in Vietnam, public support was maintained for a number of years before it completely crumbled.

Operations like Somalia don't fall into this category. From the start, most recognize that U.S. vital interests are not involved. The public pressure that propels the U.S. to get involved can quickly reverse course. While the images of thousands starving contributed to U.S. intervention, likewise, the images of dead American Army Rangers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu were a powerful force in the decision to withdraw. "If peacekeeping means Americans dying in a far-off morass, then many Americans want no truck with peacekeeping – especially under the aegis of the United Nations."¹⁶

Given the tenuous nature of public support, errors made at the operational and even the tactical level can have strategic ramifications. The operational commander must be prepared to actively engage the press in order to protect the strategic center of gravity. In many ways, he embodies the noble ideals of the mission. He is its spokesperson. Part of the requirements of operational leadership is projecting one's vision. Informing, educating, and even garnering public support will be an implied task.

His (operational commander) notoriety can expand geometrically, overnight, and he embodies the operation for the American public. Therefore, the media want access to his ideas, thoughts and explanations for what is happening in the area of operations. The commander must be prepared to meet the press and appear on live TV broadcasts.¹⁷

While garnering and maintaining public support will certainly be focused on "U.S.

support", it will also include to some degree "world support." The U.S. led 24 nations in Operation Restore Hope. Obviously, the military commander must be prepared to engage both the U.S. media and the international media for they are the conduits to support.

WHEN THE STORY BEGINS

The next defining characteristic that highlights the distinction between MOOTW and war is when the story begins.

In OOTW, the story begins when the media arrive. In most cases, this will be before the advent of major military forces. We remember the Marines with night goggles being blinded by bright television lights as they made an amphibious landing on a beach near Mogadishu in December 1992.¹⁸

In fact, the media had been in Somalia for a considerable time before the arrival of troops. As mentioned earlier, their televised images played an important role in U.S. intervention.

Why is this important? Undoubtedly, in order for the operational commander to make wise decisions, he must have an in-depth understanding of the environment. He must understand both the culture and the political motivations of all involved. In other words, he must have accurate and timely operational intelligence in order to plan the operation. That intelligence needs to be a composite of tactical and strategic intelligence. However, in countries like Somalia where no vital U.S. interests are involved, it is probable that very little attention was dedicated to gathering the requisite intelligence prior to the crisis. The operational commander will have to look elsewhere and the best place to get the most recent and possibly most accurate information is the media. After all, they have been in the country for some time and have

probably interviewed many of the key players. In addition to the indigenous population, they are likely to have interviewed many of the HROs, NGOs, and CGOs. In fact, they may have interviewed one's most likely nemeses. This is not an argument for "using" the press to gather "intel" but instead cooperating with them to gather information about the nature of the crisis.

WHO IS IN CONTROL?

This next theme of "who is in control" is divided in two parts. First, we will examine the more traditional question from the operational commander's perspective of how to control the media. Next, we will examine the more obscure question of who actually controls the operation and the implications for the operational commander and the media.

Desert Storm represented a watershed for media coverage of warfare. News organizations were able to immediately and directly transmit stories worldwide. "The commercial satellite fleets of companies such as INTELSAT, GE American Communications Inc., PANAMSAT and GTE Spacenet operated at record capacity levels during the war."¹⁹ Remarkable still is that since the few short years from Desert Storm, technology has made quantum leaps. Today one can purchase a satellite phone, which is not much larger than a cell phone, and make calls anywhere in the world. Even be in the middle of the Pacific or in the far reaches of the arctic, one can communicate via phone.²⁰ Televised images are not far behind. The suitcase size equipment that allowed news organizations to transmit during Desert Storm will, in the foreseeable future, be replaced by hand-held devices. "The instinctive military need for control is irrelevant in the face

of an institution which can field, depending on the size of the operation, thousands of reporters who are equipped with instantaneous communications capabilities.”²¹

The traditional dilemma faced by the operational commander is how does one protect the operational security of one's own forces while providing the media access to the battlefield. At this point, one might ask why these technological advances do not equally affect MOOTW and war. The significant difference between MOOTW and war lie in the nature of the battlefield. In war, like Desert Storm, a definitive battlefield line exists. While the Iraqi's may have given reporters limited access in Baghdad, they were not permitted to cover the Iraqi troops in the field. In order for the press to get combat footage, they had to acquiesce to military demands and work within the pool structure. While there are no guarantees that future wars will use the same type of media pool system, the nature of the battlefield and the theme of “when the story begins” seem to portend an environment more conducive to a traditional view of military-media relations.

This does not appear to be the case with operations other than war. They have no clear, definitive battlefield lines. Moreover, as stated earlier, the media will be present before the arrival of U.S. forces. As such, the press will generally find their way to wherever there is action. Given the nature of a failed state like Somalia, that action could be anywhere. During United Shield, General Zinni recognized the fact that he could not control the media, yet at the same time, worried that journalists running all over the country would significantly complicate his mission. This was one reason he brought them into the actual planning process and gave them access to the entire operation plan. He even went so far as telling them where he thought the next story would break. In return, the media agreed not to run around on their own. Instead, they would allow the

military to both escort and transport them to where they wanted to go.²² By recognizing that he could not "control" the media, General Zinni was able to build a bridge of cooperation that achieved both his and their needs.

The second question of control goes right to the nature of MOOTW. In war, the operational commander's mission is to win. In operations like Somalia, his mission is more likely to be one of creating stability. In Desert Storm, the coalition clearly fought a defined enemy; in Somalia the coalition exerted energy in not making enemies. Furthermore, in Desert Storm, the operational commander was the leader in the field directing the operation. In Somalia, the operational commander's role was subservient to that of the ambassador.

Besides following the lead of an ambassador, the operational commander may also vie for attention with many other types of organizations. In fact, the military's role may be to provide a safe environment so that the non-governmental organizations, private volunteer organizations (PVOs), and humanitarian relief organizations may work. Indeed, while military presence may ameliorate tensions between warring factions, the NGOs, PVOs and HROs are often better able to address the root nature of the conflict. Their success may hinge on the ability of the military to create this stability, while at the same time, the military's exit strategy may be contingent on these organization's success in addressing the root cause.

While circumstances have created this unique symbiotic relationship, many in the military and relief agencies have had a great deal of mistrust for each other. On the one hand, the military may view these organizations as a roadblock to mission accomplishment. At the same time these organizations often view the military with a

great deal of suspicion.

What role does the media play? In short, the media may be the fastest and most effective way for the operational commander to communicate with the NGOs, PVOs and HROs. Some of the suspicions of these relief organizations stem from fears that the military will take complete control of the situation and prevent them from addressing many of the root problems. Some suspicions stem from ignorance. Many know little about the military. The operational commander must make his limited objectives clear and educate them on the military's role. In short, he must attempt to build a bridge of cooperation. Although friction and squabbles are certain to arise, it is in the best interest of all involved to learn to work together. "In a 1995 address to a Cantigny conference, General Shalikashvili envisioned the military, the humanitarian agencies, and the media as strange bedfellows [that] can be a very good combination."²³

DEMANDS OF MISSION

The final characteristic that begs for a new model is the most convincing. In short, the mission itself demands a greater degree of openness between the operational commander and the media. As counterintuitive as it may initially appear, an open dialogue with the media can actually increase the operational commander's chances of achieving his mission objectives while at the same time increasing operational security.

As described earlier, both Operation Restore Hope and United Shield had limited mission objectives. In neither case, did those missions include completely disarming the clans nor attempting to enforce a settlement between the warring factions. They were not there to "defeat" an enemy or even make a peace. Both operational commanders wanted

the Somali people to understand the military's role. Accordingly, both missions attempted to advertise their intentions in order to either gain the cooperation of potential adversaries or at least influence them to avoid conflict. For example, the psychological operations (PSYOPS) of Restore Hope included leaflet drops, radio broadcasts and newspapers to educate the public on the humanitarian nature of the military's mission.²⁴ General Zinni during Operation United Shield met with Somali press each day to ensure that the local Somali press got the correct story. In addition, he utilized the daily broadcasts of the BBC as an important means to inform the Somali public and correct any rumors.²⁵

Another potential benefit to letting the media in on the operational plan is that it may actually increase operational security. For example, part of the agreement of letting the press into the operational plan for United Shield was that they would cooperate with the military when it came to security issues. Remembering back to the amphibious landing of 1992, General Zinni did not want a repeat of the lights of the media highlighting the troops coming ashore:

We gave them a position at center beach that we had cordoned off where they wouldn't interfere with the operation, where they had the best shots. We asked for no lights, but they have night cameras, obviously. And they complied. They had great shots, live feeds on the landing. But we were able to get them in the right position for the best shot and put them where they wouldn't interfere nor do something that was embarrassing to both of U.S..²⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Most recommendations have been implicitly or explicitly covered in the body of the paper. However, a few need to be reinforced. First, the operational commander should consider bringing the national media in and giving them access to the operational plan. Given the nature of MOOTW, the capabilities of the media, the mission objectives and the desire to gain public support, this might be the best means to prepare the battlefield. Furthermore, it provides important context to those who will convey the story to the public. As General Zinni has stated: "If the reports are made out of context, we complain that they don't understand. But by the same token, if they don't have the plan, how could they understand?"²⁷

Second, the operational commander must ensure that the media have access to the participating soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. "Reporters within units provide more accurate, complete and informative stories because of their access to those who are performing the mission."²⁸ Implicit to providing that access, is the obligation of the operational commander to educate and train the servicemen on the role of the press and the reasonableness of the DOD's "Open" policy. While an explanation of this "Open" policy and important issues such as "security at the source" are in Joint Pub 3-61, many of these concepts are unknown to soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. The extent to which this guidance is carried out rests on leadership of the operational commander. He sets the pace for all to follow.

Although this new paradigm has great potential to defuse much of the tension between the military and the media, it will not be fraught without difficulties. Given the

fact that peace operations are not always peaceful operations, there are certain to be times of friction. Both Restore Hope and United Shield bear truth to this statement.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the operational commander who strives for this type of openness will not be surprised from time to time with the "quality" of the stories. He may even desire to revert to the old way of doing business with the media. However, one who applies this model will be in a better position to influence the quality of the stories from the start vice having to react to breaking news. Regardless, he should be in a better position to correct inaccurate reports.

MOOTW offers the operational commander situations for levels of cooperation that are unprecedented. The media wants to get the story. The operational commander wants to get the job done. The new paradigm of openness and cooperation facilitates both ends while better enabling the operational commander to fulfill NCA desires. When mission accomplishment depends largely on the perception of whether the mission was a success or failure, it would be foolish to exclude the media. "After all, you only win unless CNN says you win."²⁹

APPENDIX A

SOMALIA 1969-1995

1969	General Siad Barre takes control
1977	Barre invades Ethiopia, loses U.S. support, turns to Soviet Union
1978	Loses in Ethiopia, turns back to U.S.
1978-89	Progressive loss of U.S. support due to human rights abuses
1991	Ongoing revolution against Barre results in chaos, U.S. NEO in January
1992 (Apr)	UNSCR #751 establishes UNOSOM. Mission is humanitarian aid and facilitate end of hostilities
1992 (Aug)	UN (UNOSOM) arrives to monitor peace between rival revolutionary groups
1992 (Aug/Jan)	U.S. airlift (PROVIDE RELIEF) supports UNOSOM
1992 (Dec)	UNSCR #794
1993 (Jan)	UNOSOM fails, U.S. initiates UNITAF (RESTORE HOPE) with UN approval
1993 (Mar)	UNSCR #814
1993 (May)	UNITAF turns over mission to UN and UNOSOM II begins
1993 (June)	Aidid forces ambush Pakistani patrol, killing 27, HOWE issues "wanted poster", reward for Aidid.
1993 (Oct)	U.S. forces lose 18 killed, 78 wounded in raid on Aidid
1993 (Oct/Dec)	U.S. withdraws forces from UNOSOM II
1994	UNOSOM II has increasing difficulty in maintaining order. Security Council fails to renew mandate.
1995 (Feb/Mar)	UNOSOM II withdraws final forces under cover of U.S. forces (UNITED SHIELD).

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- ² Charles C. Moskos and Thomas E. Ricks, "Reporting War When There Is No War," Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, 1996, 44.
- ³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War (Joint Pub 3-07) (Washington, D.C.: June 16, 1995, ix).
- ⁴ H. Hugh Shelton, "Winning the Information War in Haiti," Military Review, November-December 1995 and Zinni, Nicc. Operational commanders who encouraged a more open and direct relationship with the media wrote both articles. Their ideas form the basis for this essay.
- ⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Public Affairs in Joint Operations (Joint Pub 3-61) (Washington, D.C.: May 14, 1997, I-1).
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- ⁹ Kenneth Allard, "Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned," Institute for National Strategic Studies, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1995, 13.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 14.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 15.
- ¹² Katherine A. McGrady, Center for Naval Analyses, Marine Corps Combat Development Command (WF 13), Studies and Research Branch, The Joint Task Force in Operation Restore Hope, Alexandria, VA, 1994, 12.
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²⁰ Iridium is the company that provides this service and it began commercial operations in late 1998. "The Iridium system is a global wireless communications network that will combine the worldwide reach of 66 low-earth-orbit satellites with land-based wireless systems to enable subscribers to communicate using handheld telephones and pages virtually anywhere in the world." www.iridium.com

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²² Zinni, Nice, 28.

²³ Moskos, 23.

²⁴ McGrady, 81.

²⁵ Zinni, Nice, 29.

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²⁷ Ibid., 28.

²⁸ Ricks, 10.

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